

摘 要

威拉·凯瑟是美国历史上杰出的女作家,以描述中西部拓荒生活著称。《啊,拓荒者!》是凯瑟第一部成熟的边疆小说,也是奠定她文学地位的经典著作。这部小说首次体现了凯瑟自己的创作风格,抒发了她对自然的热爱。本论文拟从生态女性主义的视角来研究《啊,拓荒者!》中的女主角,从而探讨作品中所反映的女性和自然的关系。

生态女性主义作为女性主义思想和生态学的结合,致力于揭示父权制对妇女的压迫与对自然的掠夺之间在意识形态上的关联性。生态女性主义认为,在父权制中女性和自然扮演着同样的角色,即都是被男性自我边缘化的他者。人们对待女性和自然的态度,反映了人们的意识形态。

本论文运用生态女性主义主要观点,对女主人公亚历山德拉与自然和女性的关系进行分析,指出此角色对待自然的态度经历了一个从征服到融合的转变过程,对待自身的女性特质经历了从抗拒到认同的转变过程,体现了作家对女性和自然和谐共生关系的描写。论文正文分为三章,分别对亚历山德拉性格发展的三个阶段进行分析。第一章分析了亚历山德拉性格发展的第一阶段是男性价值观的内化,对待自然和女性的态度是征服式的,符合男性个人主义的意识形态。第二章阐述了亚历山德拉性格发展的第二阶段,她开始认同自然与女性,却未能突破男性主义的束缚。第三章是亚历山德拉性格发展的最后阶段,她看清了男性个人主义的破坏性,意识到相互理解和依存对人生的重要。女性和自然所代表的女性特质已成为她自我意识中不可分离的部分。

重读和分析威拉·凯瑟的《啊!拓荒者》这部作品不难发现女主角亚历山德拉是作家笔下的第一位完美的女主人公:她首次改变了人和自然的关系,用爱而非征服的方式去驯化蛮荒,以与自然的和谐融合彰显了女性特质的至善至美。以及她对女主人公性格转变的刻画,可以看出她的生态女性主义观点。此外,也有助于我们反思人类该如何与自然和谐共处,人与人之间该如何和谐相处,这对于我们现在建设和谐社会,倡导人与自然的和谐有一定的意义。

关键词: 生态女性主义 自然 女性 亚历山德拉

Abstract

Willa Cather (1873-1947) is a great American woman writer in American literary history. She is famous for her portrayal of the pioneering life in the middle west of America. *O Pioneers!* is her first mature novel as well as the cornerstone of her literary fame. In the novel she has formed her own writing styles and expressed her love for nature. This thesis aims at exploring the relationship between women and nature embodied in heroine of the novel in light of ecofeminist criticism.

As the combination of feminism and ecology, ecofeminism attempts to highlight the ideological interconnection of dual oppression to women and nature in a patriarchal society. Ecofeminism holds that women and nature play the same role in the patriarchal society. They both serve as the debased “other” in opposition to the masculine “self”. One’s attitude toward the association of women and nature reflects one’s ideology.

This thesis is, on the basis of ecofeminist criticism, mainly engaged in the discussion of the female character—Alexandra’s relationship with nature and with women in the novel “*O Pioneers!*”. After a careful analysis of the three stages of her character, it points out that Alexandra’s attitude toward nature has experienced a transition from conquest at the very beginning to complete integration; her attitude to her own femaleness has experienced a transition from rejection to identification. The body of the thesis consists of three chapters, analyzing three stages of development of Alexandra’s character. The first chapter points out that Alexandra’s personality is actually a kind of internalization of male values. Her conquering attitude toward women and nature coincides with patriarchal ideology in the first stage of development of her characteristics. The second chapter analyzes Alexandra’s second stage of development of character in which she begins to identify with women and nature, but still has not broken through the bondage of patriarchal ideology. Chapter three is the last period in which she recognizes the destruction of patriarchal ideology and the importance of mutual independence to human life. So women and

nature have become inseparable in her self-consciousness.

When we read and analyze Willa Cather's novel *O Pionners!* again, it is not difficult to find that the heroine Alexandra is the first perfect woman under Cather's pen because it is she who changes the relationship between human beings and nature the first time. She has tamed the wild land by love instead of conquering method. The perfection and beauty of the female personality has been shown from her harmonious introjections with nature. The depiction of Alexandra's character transition has represented Willa Cather's view of ecofeminism. It will help us to consider how to deal with the relationship between human beings and nature harmoniously, the relationship among the people. It has a practical significance for us to establish a harmonious society today.

Key words: ecofeminism nature women Alexandra

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本人所提交的学位论文《对〈啊！拓荒者〉中生态女性主义的研究(An Ecofeminist Study of the Heroine in *O Pioneer!*)》是在导师的指导下，独立进行研究工作所取得的原创性成果。除文中已经注明引用的内容外，本论文不包含任何其他个人或集体已经发表或撰写过的研究成果。对本文的研究做出重要贡献的个人和集体，均已在文中标明。

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Introduction

A. About the Author

Willa Cather (1873-1947) was one of the most influential American writers of the first half of the twentieth century, establishing herself with both novels and short stories as “an American classic,” according to Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom in their *Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy*.¹ She is very famous for her depictions of the US prairie life in her novels such as *O Pioneers!* (1913), *My Antonia* and *The Song of the Lark*. She had published twelve novels and two volumes of short stories, many essays and poems in her lifetime. Among the novels *One of Ours* won the Pulitzer Prize.

Willa Cather was born in the southern state of Virginia in 1873. At the age of eight, her family moved to the new state of Nebraska in the Middle West. She and Nebraska grew up together. Willa lived in a small town of Red Cloud. The young Cather felt the transition from the lush, cultivated farmland of Virginia to the bleak, open prairie as an assault. As a child she showed writing ability. Few girls of her time went to universities. Willa Cather, however, entered the University of Nebraska and graduated from it in 1895. Most American writers of her time looked to the eastern United States as the cultural center of the country. In her early career, Cather found herself and her voice bound by the prevailing masculine ideology in both the social climate and the literary world. As O'Brien observes in *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*,

Willa Cather was shaped by nineteenth-century assumptions about gender as well as region. Confronted by an ideology of female identity that associated womanhood with domesticity—not authorship—for many years Cather associated artistic greatness with masculinity. She did not have “much faith in women in literature,” she claimed in 1895.²

However, Cather tried to find her own position and broke through the dominant masculine trend. She was very much influenced by another female writer Sarah Orne Jewett who described life in her own region rather than following the dominant genre of historical

narrative. Jewett advised Cather to write only fiction and to deal with the places and characters she knew best. Jewett said it was the only way to write anything that would last. Thus, Cather turned to her familiar world of Nebraska. Based on her own experience on the prairie, Cather began to write novels in her own way and her Nebraska novels brought a fresh air to American literature. Cather's best novels are about those pioneers. She told what they sought and what they gained. And she developed a way of writing, both beautiful and simple, that made her a pioneer too. Because for many women in the nineteenth century, writing novels was just one of the things they did; for Willa Cather, writing was her life.

Among her Nebraska novels, *O Pioneers!* is of very successful and special importance to Cather. It is not Willa Cather's first novel but it is her first one that makes the world sit up and take notice. It is this novel that placed her in the mainstream of her western materials. It is also a celebration of the strength and courage of the pioneers. In Cather's mind, her writings about the Middle West, her prairie years, became a way to show approval of the victory of traditional values against countless difficulties. The fight to remain human and the love with life in spite of everything gives the people in her stories purpose and calmness. More importantly, *O Pioneers!* marks her departure from the masculine style of Henry James, whom she admires and imitates in her early career.

B. About the Novel

The story opens on a January day in 1883 in the little prairie town of Hanover. Alexandra Bergson, about twenty, and her very little brother Emil has come to town with her. The opening scene also introduces the other two characters, little Marie Tovesky from Omaha, who is visiting her Bohemian uncle; and Carl Linstrum who is Alexandra's German neighbor and good friend. The story moves to the Bergson farm on the Divide where Alexandra's father, John Bergson, a Swedish immigrant, is dying and he loads the responsibility of farming the land and the whole family affairs on his oldest child Alexandra before his death though he has two sons, Oscar and Lou. It becomes obvious that Alexandra is much stronger and resolute than his brothers. John Bergson's death is followed by three fat years and three lean years. Many families, including Carl Linstrum's sell their farm and move away. However,

Alexandra stays in the farm and convinces her brothers to re-mortgage farms and buy more land. In ten years, she believes, they will be prosperous, independent landowners and farmers with vision being rewarded. Alexandra is right. A decade later the country is the proprietor of "one of the richest farms on the Divide." Her brother Lou and Oscar are married, and each owns his own farm. Her little brother Emil has left home for State University. Old Ivar, a very strange man, who loves the land and animals in a very crazy way works in Alexandra's stable now. At the same time, Carl Linstrum returns for a long visit after many years of traveling. Meanwhile Marie and Emil are falling in love despite Marie has her own family and husband, Frank Shabata. Emil is determined to flee from the Divide. Before he can leave, though, tragedy strikes. his best friend, Amedee, dies unexpectedly. After Amedee's funeral, Emil wants to say farewell to Marie. Marie stays in the orchard and he lies down next to her. Unfortunately, Marie's jealous husband finds them and he shoots them both dead by fury. Of course it is a serious strike on the side of Alexandra, however, she tries to pardon Frank, who is serving a ten-year-sentence in jail. At the same time, hearing the tragedy happening on Alexandra's family, Alexandra's intimate friend Carl comes back from Alaska. It is a very satisfactory ending in the novel that they find comfort and companionship in each other thus they decide to get married.

C. Literature Review

O Pioneers! is one of Cather's famous Nebraska novels. It is usually regarded as a milestone of her literary creation. In this novel she abandoned the artificial Jamesian formulas of her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, and filled it with her "own" past experience in Nebraska.

During the last century, Cather's literary position was mixed with high praise and severe criticism. In 1938, Sinclair Lewis declared that he would vote for Willa Cather as the "greatest American novelist".³ After the publication of her series of prairie novels *O Pioneers!* *My Antonia* and *The Song of the Lark*, Cather had established her literary fame and with the popularity of her Middle West novels she was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. So she had drawn readers' attention and was like a newly risen star by the 1920s.

N.Elizabeth Monroe who is a famous critic argues that Cather is one of those novelists “who wins a place in public regard in part through the essential nobility of their characters and their clear-sighted rectitude rather than through the direct processes of art.”⁴

For a while, Cather’s popularity was not so well acknowledged. With the development of industry and economy in the 1930s and 1940s, material pursuit had become prevailing in American society and people had no interest in the consideration of spiritual pursuit. The traditional modes that lead to success, which Cather advocated much in her works, have no attraction from people. Her fame decreased after 1930s. The main reason is that her unique creating style seemed out-of-date then.

Fortunately, studies on Cather’s works have become a hot issue after two decades. Because the showy and luxurious period was past, people have experienced severe spiritual emptiness in the highly materialized life. Then people began to realize the artistic style and spiritual beauty in Cather’s works. During 1970s and 1980s many writers launched studies on Cather’s works from feminist and ecological perspective. So up till now there have been special seminars on Cather’s works in the world.

In *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism* Joan Acocella points out that “Cather is traditionally regarded as the elegist of the pioneer periods, the repository of what America thinks of as its early, true-grit triumphs”.⁵ Acocella finds that critics praised Cather for her broadening of subject matter to include the lives of poor immigrant farmers and for her prose style. A few good studies such as that of E.K.Brown or David Daiche tended to depict her as either “the Prairie Elegist” or “the Classicial /Christian Idealist”. Feminist critics attempt to show Cather in conflict and deduce from that she was lesbian. The book that garnered most critical attention with this approach was O’Brien’s psycho-sexual study, *Willa Cather: the Emerging Voice* (1987). O’Brien examines the social, political, and ideological forces of American canon formation and draws a conclusion that Cather is a homosexual writer. Other critics have examined the larger cultural issues that serve as a backdrop to Cather’s writing. Guy Reynolds looks at issues of race and empire in *Willa Cather in Context*, while Susan J. Rosowski examines the romantic literary tradition in *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather’s Romanticism*, out of which Cather wrote. Some critics regard Cather as a liberal humanist. For example, at the 1973 Cather Centennial Conference, Donald Sutherland spoke of

Cather's loyalty to liberal humanism, thereby affirming her sense of values.

Research on Cather in China began a bit late. The novel was introduced to China in 1970s. Cather's unique style of being prosaic, lucid and lyric, matching perfectly with her unique theme of depicting the western prairie and its pioneers impressed the readers. Many scholars take interest in it and have conducted research on it. Therefore, there have been different studies on it, such as feminist reading, ecological interpretation and even queer theory applied to understand the novel. For example, Liu Huiqing's thesis "Womanism in *O Pioneers!*" has analyzed comprehensively the protagonist Alexandra in the novel by feminist approach so as to reveal themes concerning female experience. Another thesis written by Song Yan, "The Tendency of Willa Cather's Feminist Thinking in Her *O Pioneers!*" has applied the feminist literary approach and has given a detailed analysis of the heroine Alexandra in an attempt to illustrate Cather's feminist tendency and prove that in a sense, Cather is a precursor of modern feminism. The thesis written by Bai Jing, "The Analysis of Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* from the Perspective of Ecocriticism" has enhanced the readers' understanding of the new literary critical trend in the 21st century as well as the novels written by Willa Cather.

Different analyses in different periods have contributed much to the study of the novel but little is done to reveal the ecofeminism in it. So far only few have paid attention to ecofeminism embodied in it. Zhang Luo once wrote "The Pursuit of Self in Nature: An Ecofeminist Study of Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*". The thesis explored women's quest for self identity with their understanding of nature. Another one "An Ecofeminist Approach on Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*" written by Guo Jie gave a sweeping glance of ecofeminism in the novel on Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and discussed the female character—Alexandra Bergson's relation with nature and women in the novel. A third one "From Masculine Self to Ecological Self—An Ecofeminist Reading of *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*" written by Zhu Ping gave a simple analysis about ecofeminism in the two novels.

Thus this thesis aims at thoroughly exploring the themes of ecofeminism embodied in the novel by the characterization of Alexandra Bergson in the development of three stages so that a comprehensive understanding of Cather's figures can be achieved. It also attempts to enable readers to see Cather's literary vision so as to enhance our understanding of Willa

Cather and her novel.

D. Relevant Theories

Ecofeminism is the social movement that regards the oppression of women and nature as interconnected. It is one of the few movements and analyses that actually connect feminism and ecology. More recently, ecofeminist theorists have extended their analyses to consider the interconnections between sexism, the domination of nature (including animals), and also racism and social inequalities. Consequently it is now better understood as a movement working against the interconnected oppressions of gender, race, class and nature.

Ecofeminism sprouted in the early 1970s as western women became disillusioned with the ideologies of the day. The term “ecofeminism” was first coined by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort [Feminism or Death]* (1974), in which she called for an ecological revolution led by women. She sought to describe the epic violence inflicted on women and nature as result of male domination. Ecofeminism is a social and political movement which unites ecology and feminism. It fights against the “maldevelopment and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism”⁶ According to Greta Gaard,

Ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppressions of nature..⁷

Therefore, most ecofeminists would agree with the core precept that the domination of women and the domination of nature are fundamentally connected. In other words, violence against Mother Earth came to be intertwined with an emerging urge to subdue and control women. These twin oppressions were created and are perpetuated by an ideology called patriarchy. The Western patriarchal way of thinking is based on “dualism.” Dualism is a world view that splits mind from body, spirit from matter, male from female, humans from nature. It thereby creates imbalanced power relationships by artificially dividing entities in

half, according one side of the equation greater worth over the other. Dualism has established a self/other pattern of relationship among individuals even extends to the relationship of humans and nature. Men advocate independence, conquest and production instead of women's dependence, care and reproduction. As a result, women are debased because they are the "other" of men; and nature is debased because it is the "other" of human beings. Nature is always feminized and women are always naturalized. The land and the female body have nearly become the simulacrum of each other, both indicating the image of vessel waiting for men's planting "seeds". Therefore the essence of the association between women and nature is the "female otherness". Because of this latent cultural exertion, one's attitude toward women is usually the same as that toward nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. The goal of ecofeminism is to destroy the patriarchal power, and to create a new social structure which is based on the peaceful coexistence of nature and human, men and women. It aims to eliminate the oppression between the "self" and "other" and promotes an ecological perception of existence: mutual dependence.

With the emerging of ecofeminism, there have been more and more scholars who adopt an ecofeminist approach in their literary study. According to Gaard and Murphy, criticism in light of ecofeminism aims to answer the following questions:

What previously unnoticed elements of a literary text are made visible, or even foregrounded, when one reads from an ecofeminist perspective?...How might an ecofeminist perspective enhance explorations of connections and differences among "characters" in a text-between humans and animals, between culture and nature, and across human differences of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation-connections and differences that affect our relationships with nature and with each other?

Recently, many scholars have also studied and commented on Cather's works from the perspectives of ecofeminism, especially her novel *O Pioneers!* Analyses are mainly devoted to praising the character Alexanddra's ideal feminine personality which tallies with the central principles of ecofeminism, such as love for land, independence and harmonious relationship

with nature. It was she who changed the relationship between human and nature for the first time. However, little attention has been paid to the process of development of Alexandra's inner characteristics and integration with nature. Zhou Ming who is from Beijing Foreign Language University has analyzed Alexandra's process of gender identification very well in her paper. In it, she argues that at the beginning of the novel *O Pioneers!* Alexandra is in fact a man with a female mask who identifies herself with the male ideology. With the increasing self-consciousness, she gradually accepts her female identity, and finally breaks away from the male dominance and becomes a perfect woman.

Based on current criticism, this thesis tries to have more complete comprehensive view to interpret the relationship between woman and nature by using ecofeminist criticism. It puts forward that Cather's work shows clear ecofeminist consciousness by Alexandra's process of gender identification with her understanding of nature.

E. Structure of Thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter one focuses on the first stage of the development of Alexandra Bergon's personality. It is mainly about her alienation and belittlement of femininity. This period is her girlhood when she behaves with obvious androcentrism tendency toward gender consciousness and nature conception. Her attitude toward nature is masculine and she is the conqueror of nature. Crazy Ivar contrasts to her and he has feminine attitude toward nature.

Chapter Two concentrates on Alexandra's process of transition from masculinity to femininity. She shows ambivalent characteristics to identify with nature and female identity in her womanhood. She has experienced a transition from male selfness to female selfness and she has changed to a friend of nature. In her inner heart she has undergone budding and growth of femininity. In this chapter Marie as a symbol of nature will also be analyzed in order to better understand Alexandra.

Chapter Three examines Alexandra's final transition to femininity which succeeds in her final love and marriage with Carl. In this chapter Alexandra becomes the daughter of nature. Her reconstruction and development of femininity will be mainly analyzed. She has achieved

a transformation to a perfect femininity. Furthermore, Alexandra has a new understanding of the land; she has introjected herself with the land closely.

Conclusion sums up the main ideas of this thesis. The thesis concludes that Willa Cather shows clear ecofeminist consciousnesses by analyzing heroine Alexandra's process of development in her inner characteristics and integration with nature.

Chapter One

Conqueror of Nature: Alienation and Belittlement of Femininity

The first stage of the development of Alexandra Bergson's personality is actually a kind of internalization of male values. This period is her girlhood when she behaves with obvious androcentrism tendency toward gender consciousness and nature conception. Her name is a derivative of a masculine name, Alexander the Great, the famous king of Macedon, and she also possesses masculine qualities. It is her masculine qualities that reinforce her sense of completeness and wholeness and play an important role in her struggling with the harsh circumstance. This stage is displayed in the first part of the novel—"The Wild Land." The story opens with a winter landscape scene. Snow and howling wind blow under the buildings in the small Nebraska town of Hanover: A mist of fine snowflakes is curling on gray prairie under gray sky; the howling wind blows heavily, the whole country is frozen and stern. The great fact is the land itself, which seems to overwhelm the little beginning of human society that struggles in its somber wastes. Swedish immigrant John Bergson dies and loads the responsibility of managing a 640 acre farm and taking care of the whole family on his only daughter Alexandra's shoulder. Her homestead is located a region called Divide. For the first three years after John Bergson's death, the affairs of his family prosper. Then comes the hard times of three years drought and failure many families including Alexandra's good friend—Carl Linstrum sell their farms and move away. Every one in the town is to the brink of despair. Because of Alexandra's strong determination she believes in the promise of the country and persuades her two brothers to re-mortgage more farms and buy more lands. Through her hard work and effort she gets her reward from land eventually and becomes the most prosperous farmer in the country. As to her success and achievement many feminist critics are especially excited because of her female identification. What they stress and advocate is her female pioneering spirit and experience. However, this point of view needs to be reconsidered. From perspective of ecofeminism, in the first stage, Alexandra's attitude toward women and nature is conquering manner which accords with male-centered pioneering tradition. What she behaves and cherishes is of patriarchy. Therefore, she appears

to be a conqueror and owner of both women and nature.

A. Patriarchal Tendency

1. Character and Temperament

At the very beginning of the novel, from a stander-by's perspective Cather sketches the heroine Alexandra briefly and vividly to the readers. One side of her character and temperament is revealed to us clearly. Alexandra shows many male features such as her determination, courage and strength.

On windy Nebraska town of Hanover, a shabby little traveling man, who was just then coming out of store on his way to the saloon, stopped and gazed stupidly at the shinning mass of hair of a girl bared when she took off her veil. 'My God, girl, what a head of hair!' he exclaimed, quite innocently and foolishly. She stabbed him with a glance of Amazonian fierceness and drew in her lower lip-most unnecessary severity. It gave the little clothing drummer such a start that he actually let his cigar fall to the sidewalk and went off weakly in the teeth of the wind to the saloon. His hand was still unsteady when he took his glass from the bartender. His feeble flirtatious instincts had been crushed before, but never so mercilessly.⁹

So in a very simple plot, to the eyes of a stander-by who encounters Alexandra, we can see a resolute girl whose appearance is forceful and cruel even animals and beasts are frightened by her great courage. It is Alexandra who has this kind of male character and temperament and this is the deepest impression on us. Because when a man pays her a compliment for her beautiful hair, a common symbol of femininity, it is normal for a girl to be attracted by a man, but Alexandra's reaction is indeed as the novel terms "most unnecessary". According to feminism, the real effective way to fight against patriarchal oppression is not to stand against every man. She over reaction indicates her complete rejection of femininity in herself. Femininity, according to Alexandra's notion, belongs to the weak and should be repressed.

And then Cather reveals another side of Alexandra's character from different

perspectives continually. Although the perspectives are still from stander-bys, we can penetrate into the heroine's inner heart deeper. What she manifests indeed convinces readers that she is a masculinized heroine. It is obvious that Alexandra's father John Bergon knows her daughter very well. Because before she was twelve years old she began to be a help to him, and as she grows older he has come to depend more and more upon her resourcefulness and good judgment. It is Alexandra who reads the papers and follows the markets, and who learns by the mistakes of their neighbors. It is Alexandra who can always tell about what it has cost to fatten each steer, and who can guess the weight of a hog before it goes to the scales.

From then on, Alexandra's figure becomes fuller gradually to add a dimensionality to her character. It is known that female figures are endowed with tenderness, sympathy and shyness in traditional narrating stories. Even today, the biblical image of women as the ribs of Adam is still ingrained in the minds of many modern people. However, Cather not only adds male characteristic on Alexandra such as vigorous physique, tough will and forceful characters as well as awesome spirit but also sense of logic which even exceeds male figures on her. The following description is a typical example to prove it.

In order to search for self-development during the drought hard times, "having ulterior motives", Alexandra spends five days down among the river farms, driving up and down the valley. She talks to the men about their crops and to the women about their poultry. She spends a whole day with one young farmer who has been away at school, and who is experimenting with a new kind of clover hay. She learns a great deal. After this research on site, she makes rational judgment: she must stay on the lands and search for self-development on her own farm recurring to grasping the latest information. When she returns to her homestead, she holds a family meeting immediately. Therefore, using the following depiction from the novel, it is good for us to understand her rational side and independent thinking more vividly and intuitionisticly:

The land sells for three times as much as this, but in five years we will double it. The rich men on there own all the best land and they are buying all they can get. The thing to do is sell our cattle and what little old corn we have, and buy the Linstrum place. Then the next thing to do is to take out

two loans on our half-sections. And buy Peter Crow's place; raise every dollar we can, and buy every acre we can." ... "See here, we borrow the money for six years. Well, with the money we buy a half-section from Linstrum and a half from Crow, and a quarter from Struble, maybe. That will give us upwards of fourteen hundred acres, won't it? You won't have to pay off your mortgages for six years. By that time, any of this land will be worth thirty dollars an acre—it will be worth fifty, but we'll say thirty; then you can sell a garden patch anywhere, and pay off a debt of sixteen hundred dollars. It's not the principal I'm worried about; it's the interest and taxes. We'll have to strain to meet the payments but as sure as we are sitting here to-night, we can sit down here ten years from now independent landowners, not struggling farmers any longer. The chance that father was always looking for has come.¹⁰

So from the first chapter of the novel, we find out that it's Alexandra who puts up the first silo on the Divide; it's Alexandra who puts in the first field of alfalfa, which turns to be the salvation of this country. It's also Alexandra who says the land is about ready for wheat and has to raise three big wheat crops before others quit putting all their land in corn. Her rational character and independent temperament as well as her intelligence integrate together making her to be a masculinized heroine.

Having masculine attributes, Alexandra plays the symbolic role as the heir of her father. Acting as leadership in the family and in land management during the sixteen years, she deals with business in the masculine ideology. She separates herself from "feminine" traits. Her masculinity is not only measured through her character and temperament but also through distance from the "feminine" attributes.

2. Cross-Dressing and Repression of Sexuality

At the very beginning of this novel, Alexandra comes out on the stage as a man without any female features in her behavior and manner. It is complete appearance of a man. She is "tall, strong" and walks "rapidly and resolutely". She has a serious and thoughtful face. By using a lot of masculine adjectives in description, Cather presents the image of a female pioneer. More importantly, Alexandra breaks through gender and dress codes; she chooses to look like a man on clothes. She wears "a man's long ulster," "not as if it were an affliction,

but as if it were very comfortable and belonged to her, carried it like a young soldier”¹¹ Alexandra’s transvestism hints her male-dominating value orientation, as Annie Woodhouse says in *Fantastic Women: Sex, Gender and Transvestism*,

Appearance is more than simply the physical, outward manifestation of gender. It both molds and is molded by, a person’s own sense of identity. It is a means of signaling to others a whole range of meaning about oneself, about the relationship of self and others, and about the expressions one has of others and what their expectation in turn might be. In short, appearance makes a statement about what a person is (or would like to be) and about the groups that person identify with. When women do wear masculine-style fashion this can confer touches of masculine status.¹²

Therefore, in every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness. Gender difference is not simply a sign of sex difference; rather it is a symbol of the nature of gender status in day-to-day. While dress indicates social position in terms of wealth and standing, it also serves as a means of sexual display. It is said when women put on men’s clothes they usually present considerable dignity, and sometimes great elegance and sophistication.

Alexandra’s cross-dressing hints that she is willing to play the role of a man in the society, namely, to be the leader of the family and take on the responsibility of supporting the family. It shows her intention to expect others to consider her as a man. There is an obvious contrast between Alexandra in appearance and dressing and another important woman figure in the first part of the novel, Marie Shabata. More traditionally feminine than the young Alexandra, Marie has “brown curly hair, like a brunette doll’s”, and dresses in the “Kate Greenaway”¹³ manners, already a follower of fashion though she is a very little girl. As a petted, indulged little girl, she is in circle of males who make offerings of candy, little pigs and spotted calves to her as bribes to let her choose a sweetheart. Even when a child, responding to male admiration with great good nature and reaction Marie is seductive and flirtatious rather than Amazonian fierceness as Alexandra does.

In a sense, Alexandra’s cross-dressing is what Siduentes-Jauregui says “Transvestism becomes a special kind of self expression which shows the abandonment of aesthetics of the

same sex and identification with the opposite sex.”¹⁴ It is a statement about her identification with the men group. Therefore, Alexandra’s cross-dressing manifests her eagerness and aspiration to male power and status in her inner heart. It has a special symbolic meaning. It actually shows that the woman pioneer in this stage is a male conqueror who wears a “mask” of woman. She approves male-dominating value and rejects her own female identity.

In reality, Cather emphasizes more on Alexandra’s repressing her feminine mentality. Through the following depictions we can see Alexandra not only tries to deny her feminine physical appearance but also tries to repress her female sexuality. She has a dream in which she is lifted up bodily and carried away in the arms of an earth lover:

It was a man certainly, but he was like no man she knew; he was much larger and stronger and swifter, and he carried her as easily as if she were sheaf of wheat. She never saw him, but, with eyes closed, she could feel that he was yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him. She could feel him approach, bend over her and lift her, and then she could feel herself being
* carried swiftly off across the fields...¹⁵

This dream, which usually occurs on Sunday mornings when she is able to abed later, indicates Alexandra’s desire for sexual fulfillment with a male. It’s very normal and physiological need for a young woman like Alexandra. It also reveals the other aspects of the strong Alexandra’s femininity. However, from her subconsciousness it is regarded as weakness and should be repressed. When she wakes up, “she is very angry with herself”, “taking her bath with vigor and pouring buckets of cold water over her gleaming white body.”¹⁶ This represents that Alexandra tries to control her body by her mind and give up her own sexual needs.

So from the above depiction of Alexandra’s repression of sexuality we can see what ecofeminists fight against coincides with Alexandra’s male-dominating value. Ecofeminism is a social movement that regards the oppression of women and nature as interconnected. The root of the oppression is androcentrism or male-dominance. These oppressions were created and are perpetuated by an ideology called patriarchy. The Western patriarchal way of thinking is based on “dualism”. Dualism is a world view that splits men from women, mind from body,

human from nature, spirit from matter. It thereby creates imbalanced power relationships by artificially dividing entities in half, according one side of the equation greater worth over the other. Dualism has established a self/other pattern of relationship among individuals even extends to the relationship of human and nature. Women are debased because they are the "other" of men; nature is debased because it is the "other" of human beings and also body is debased because it is the "other" of mind. So obviously in this stage, by trampling female body as disparaging "other", her body is controlled by her mind, Alexandra seeks a kind of masculinist ideology. Her sense of "self" (male-dominating value) establishes in this way together with her attitude toward women and nature.

3. Relationship with Her Mother and Father

Ecofeminist thinks that harmony between daughter and mother should become an opposing strength to patriarchal ideology, because it has established its feminine space in traditional patriarchal system. But in fact Alexandra's relationship with her mother is not as close as that with her father. Because of the long lasting internalization of long time world view of patriarchal system, Alexandra's mother Mrs. Bergson's has become a willing victim. Although she is not satisfied with her husband Mr. Bergson's decisions she has to obey them silently. It is strange that Alexandra does not show sympathy for her mother. To some extent, the alienated relationship between daughter and mother also accelerates Alexandra's rejection to the traditional femininity and tendency to masculinity. She seems to align more with her father than her mother in the sense that she participates in the production field instead of the reproduction one.

Alexandra's active participation in the social production field and her absence in the reproduction field are also reflected in human labor division. In the first part of the novel, Alexandra seldom takes part in domestic affairs. What she inherits from her father is a strong belief that they should obtain economic interests from the land. Her relationship with her father Mr. Bergson is very close, which is in sharp contrast with that between her and her mother Mrs. Bergson. Her relationship with mother is rather bleak and from her mother she has inherited very little. In the novel Cather has never mentioned that Alexandra helps her mother with domestic activities such as working in the orchard, jam preserving, or

housekeeping. There is little scene for Alexandra to have a heart-to-heart talk with her mother. Being absent from the traditional feminine field, she is just like a man who completely participates in production and rejects reproduction.

In a patriarchal system, men establish “separate spheres” from which they benefit much more than women do. Thus, “a woman’s life was physically spent in the home and with the family, while the man’s life was largely outside the home, at work”.¹⁷ The traditional ideology to women is that they should subject to men and have full responsibility to join the routine business of the family. Women’s lives are restrained in the housework and housekeeping is a way of organizing a confined world. Solitary women who are shaped by men’s expectations inevitably find in domestic service not only a defense against patriarchal values but a connection to community. Therefore, women share a common language in housekeeping from this point of view.

In the novel, Alexandra’s mother Mrs. Bergson is a good housewife:

For eleven years she has worthily striven to maintain some semblance of household order amid conditions that made order very difficult. Habit was very strong with Mrs. Bergson, and her unrelenting efforts to repeat the routine of her old life among new surroundings had done a great deal to keep the family from disintegrating morally and getting careless in their ways. She also goes fishing herself and is very good at gardening. “Alexandra often said that if her mother were cast upon a desert island, she would thank God for her deliverance, make a garden, and find something to preserve. Preserving was almost a mania with Mrs. Bergson. Stout as she was, she roamed the scrubby banks of Norway Creek looking for fox grapes and goose plums, like a wild creature in search of prey. She made a yellow jam of the insipid ground-cherries that grew on the prairie, flavoring it with lemon peel; and she made a sticky dark conserve of garden tomatoes. She had experimented even with the rank buffalo-pea...”¹⁸

It is certain that Mrs. Bergson is a queen in the separate reproductive field and a living embodiment of it. Very strangely, the mother-daughter relationship is meaningless, because in the novel Alexandra seldom involves in reproductive activities like her mother. In her inner heart she has her own desires instead of having traditional domestic skills or interests. The

desire what she longs for requires physical strength rather than beauty or other feminine traits. It's easy to understand that her will to conquer the land is strong and housekeeping to which her mother adheres becomes an obstacle to her aim. Thereby, she rejects her female identity and characteristics and seeks a man-like identity.

Absent from the traditionally feminine world, Alexandra acts like a man and plays the symbolic role as "the heir of the father". So Cather has established the father-daughter relationship as the key one. Cather pays attention to the strength of Alexandra's body as well as her temperament towards management and leadership. Mr. Bergson gives to Alexandra his authority, which allows her to begin to maintain her authority over her brother. In this way, the father-daughter relationship is enhanced greatly. We can see that the novel's setting is a patriarchal rather than a utopian world through this relationship. The reason why Alexandra is chosen as the heir of her father is that she possesses many traditional male characteristics such as fortitude, business ability and logical thought. The case can be proved from her father's comment on her:

Alexandra, her father often said to himself, was like her grandfather, which was his way of saying that she was intelligent... In his daughter, John Bergson recognized the strength of will, and the simple directly way of thinking things out, that had characterized his father in better days. He would much rather, of course, have seen this likeness in one of his sons, but it was not a question of choice. As he lay there day after day he had to accept the situation as it was, and to be thankful that there was one among his children to whom he could entrust the future of his family and the possibility of his hard-won land.¹⁹

Therefore, Alexandra's patriarchal tendency can be shown from her character, temperament, crossing-dressing, repression of sexuality and relationship with her mother and father. The first period of the development of her character is indeed a kind of internalization of male values. She regards women and her own female traits as the "other" to reject, which accords with ecofeminist view that women and nature play the same role in the patriarchal society. They both serve as the debased "other" in opposition to the masculine "self". One's attitude toward the association of women and nature reflects one's ideology.

B. Rejection of Nature

The connection between women and nature, the two feminine gendered entities, is one of the main principles of ecofeminism. We can say that one's attitude toward this connection reflects one's ideology. In the process of building western industrial civilization, nature became something to be dominated, overcome, made to serve the need of men. She was stripped of her magical powers and properties and was reduced to "natural resources" in opposition to nature. In this way, nature became "other", something essentially different from the dominant, to be objectified and subordinated. What the ecofeminism criticizes is the kind of patriarchy which rejects nature as the "other". Alexandra in the first stage rejects her female identity as "other" and keeps herself away from it. Alexandra's attitude toward nature can be explicitly explained by her relationship with a nature identifying figure, namely, Crazy Ivar. So by analyzing old Ivar's strange behaviors and thoughts as well as his living surroundings and his treatment to livestock and animals helps to understand Alexandra's attitude to nature.(the land, livestock and animals all belong to nature) Alexandra's masculine management of the land is a negation of Ivar's identification of the land. Ivar is a symbol of nature and he has close relation with nature and is associated with femininity. Alexandra debases femininity and nature together by acting superior to him thus draws a clear-cut line between her "self" and the "other".

Together with Alexandra, Ivar is one of the most memorable characters in the novel. He is the highest representative who has a harmonious relationship with nature. He lives far away from the world, settling in the rough country across the country line, where no one lives but Russians. He explains his choice by saying that the fewer neighbors he has, the fewer temptations he will meet. He is an herbalist and vegetarian who preach non-violence. Ivar lives as a veterinarian and provides a refuge for wild life on the Divide. What the strangest thing is that he walks barefoot and allegedly howls at night. His behavior and thought are so crazy that people call him "Crazy Ivar." His identification, protection and maintaining to nature are so devout that he almost forgets himself. Ivar unites himself so fully with nature that his home has little difference with the landscape.

At one end of the pond was an earthen dam, planted with green willow bushes, and above it a door and a single window were set into the hillside. ... And that was all you saw. Not a shed, not a corral, not a well, not even a path broken in the curly grass: ... Ivar had lived for three years in the clay bank, without defiling the face of nature any more than the coyote that had lived there before him had done... Ivar found contentment in the solitude he had sought out for himself. He dislikes the litter of human dwellings: the broken food, the bits of broken china, the old wash-boilers and tea-kettles thrown onto the sunflower patch. ... He always said that the badgers had cleaner house than people, and that when he took a housekeeper her name would be Mrs. Badger. ...²⁰

Not only his living surroundings are very clean and beautiful but also his little cave house is simple and practical. In his little cave house, he has but one room, neatly plastered and whitewashed, and there is a wooden floor, a kitchen stove, a table covered with oilcloth, two chairs, a calendar, a few books on the window-shelf, nothing more. The place is as clean as cupboard. He sleeps in a hammock, with a rolled buffalo robe in it.

Thus, we can see Ivar is indeed very queer from the description of his living surroundings and the interior decoration. However, analyzed from the perspective of ecofeminism, his living surroundings and the interior decoration represent the ecological idea that human being can be completely self-sufficient by leading a simple life, sharing the physical environment and corresponding with nature's cyclic changes without hurting the natural world. It is this idea that the ecofeminists approve of.

Meanwhile, Ivar is a protector of wild life by banning guns on his land and caring for animals, which represents a prophetic plea for non-violence, both within the human community and in the interaction between human beings and other life forms. Ivar relates to animals intuitively and he is one of them in a way because he understands animals. His close relationship with animals allows him to heal them, as in the cases of the local farmer's livestock or the Bequests' panicked cow. Dissolving the boundaries between him and the natural world, Ivar does not separate himself from the animals he cares for: "They say when horses have distemper he takes the medicine himself, and then prays over the horses"²¹. He doctors sick animals. Once doctoring a horse which swelled up most as big as the water-tank after eating green corn, he kept patting her and groaning as if he had the pain himself, and

saying, “There sister, that’s easier, that’s better.”²² These cases show that Ivar loves animals in heart and soul and treat them like his brothers and sisters.

The above legendary descriptions about Ivar have some religious color to some degree. That’s no wonder he is called “an Americanize nature of god”. What the ecofeminists interested in is that this nature god is actually a maternal god who has obvious female characteristics. There are three items to prove Ivar’s feminine characteristics.

Firstly, he is an embodiment of a housewife: he is excelling in doing housework and keen on discussing it with people. When Alexandra comes to him to buy hummock, they sit together and talk about his housekeeping. When they talk about raising hogs, Ivar gives her some advice on it. He understands that hogs need plenty of clean water, only grain, clean feed, and they do not like to be filthy, which is met with disbelief by everyone except Alexandra who immediately takes Ivar’s advice and recorgnizes her hog operation. Ivar’s attitude towards nonhuman animals espouses views of ecofeminism: attend to what animals communicate to us, treat them with humility and respect. Human’s relationship with other animals should be based on humility and respect in order to structure a new relationship between ourselves and the environment. It accords with the principle of “mutual dependence”.

Secondly, His care and doctoring for the animals belong to the traditional female behavior and so his image is a loving mother.²³ His love for animals and birds shows his standpoints that animals and birds stand on the same platform each has its own value and rights to live on the earth.

Finally, he shows the image of women group: his empathy extends the idea of kinship to include all forms of life. Thus, he calls other people and even the animals as “sister”. Ivar’s feminie characterstic and care for nature represent the core of ecofeminist theories which is about the values of care, interdependency and selfless altruism.

However Ivar is nicknamed as the Crazy Ivar because in the other people’s eyes, his livng is very abnormal. Occasionally, Alexandra goes to Ivar for advice, but she is nearly the same as her contemptuous brothers Lou and Oscar as she can not completely accept Ivar’s identification with nature and thinks he is “cloudy”minded sometimes. Ivar’s natural way of living and his super ability to communicate and doctor animals are widely taken as a token of

his madness by prairie pioneers. No one thinks Ivar is “able to prove up on his land because he works so little”.²⁴

Compared with Ivar, Alexandra has shown negligence to nature. Although Alexandra shows respect to him, her real intention is to get some advice about raising the livestock from him. The purpose for her to contact with Ivar is for pursuing of economic interest and gain material profit instead of loving animals and nature sincerely. When they pay a visit to Ivar, Lou expresses his wishes to kill wild ducks for supper. Alexandra persuades him not to kill because Ivar will get angry and will not give her advice on farm affairs. This reveals that Alexandra differs greatly from Ivar and she does not love nature as Ivar does, she just regards nature as a tool to satisfy the will of human beings to conquer and make use of. In her eyes, hogs, livestock and other animals as well as land can all be utilized by human beings, in return, human beings need not give them more concerns and care. She thinks that she can let the land grow up any kind of crop which she wants to. Though eventually Alexandra follows Ivar’s advice and builds a new tidy hog corral, she aims at profits and judges things by their usefulness to human beings. Her sympathy for and attention on the land is all because of its potential of increasing value. She does not even plan to cultivate that wild land, so she buys the land for speculation. Ecofeminism defines authentic love of nature as recognition of its intrinsic value. Things should not be judged by its usefulness to human beings. The things-for-us thinking is anthropocentric and masculinist. What Ivar displays is the ecofeminist aesthetics of love, care and interconnections. His sense of “self” is constructed through, not against nature and femininity. His living style is maintaining and feminine which belong to a category of social reproduction; Conversely, Alexandra’s cultivating lands is exploring and masculine which belong to the category of social production. So Alexandra’s attitude to nature is rejection of the “other” and her real purpose is to gain material profit. According to ecofeminism, the only correct and effective way is to abandon the false concept of limitless production of industrial capitalism and advocate basic need and sustainable ecology.²⁵

By analyzing Alexandra’s patriarchal tendency and her rejection of nature as the “other” from the view of ecofeminism, we can get the following conclusion:

Although Alexandra is designated head of the house by her father, her father is reluctant to admit that his daughter is more able and more suited to support the family than his two sons. Mr. Bergson's prejudice results from the masculine ideology. Women are confined with domestic services by male pioneers and male pioneers do their "useful" work of gathering wood, hauling water, and harvesting crops and so on.

Therefore, the father makes his choice according to masculine characteristic, such as resourcefulness and good judgment. Alexandra is chosen not because she is a daughter but because she is more of a "son" to her father rather than a daughter of the mother. After John Bergson's death, his photo is hung on the wall. Looking at the photo reminds Alexandra of her father and at the same time her status. The father has defined the family responsibility for her and thus made her restrained within the masculine field. She manages the land in a masculine way characterized by conquering and desire for material achievement. So in her girlhood she is a person who regards nature and women as the "female otherness" by contrast with her sense of self. Femininity is another name of frailty to her. What displays in her are the heroic virtues of endeavor, strong determination and firmness, all stereotyped masculine pioneer virtues. Although she displays preeminent ability and intelligence in operating the land, all correct measures are from her acute commercial sense and responsibilities to the patriarchal family. In the final analysis, her aim is to finish her father's will and gain property to maintain her authority in the family. In this stage, she is actually a female image identified with masculinity and becomes a representative of patriarchal system in her ideology.

Chapter Two

Friend of Nature: Budding and Growth of Femininity

Alexandra shows ambivalent characteristics to identify with nature and female identity in her womanhood. She has experienced a transition from male selfness to female selfness. Her second stage of the development of characteristics is mainly expressed through the following three chapters of the novel: "Neighboring Fields", "Winter Memories" and "The White Mulberry Tree". The stories in these three chapters are about people's love, sorrow, happiness and death after they have tamed the wild land. Through great efforts of sixteen years, Alexandra not only fulfills the task which her father entrusts with her, but also brings prosperity of her family and her community eventually. Alexandra has achieved great success and become one of the most prosperous farmers of the Divide region. Now that the problem of survival has been solved, it is time for her to enter and deal with the relationship of the human emotional world. Compared with the other characters' participation in the three chapters such as Emil, Marie, Carl and Frank, Alexandra's little participation in this period makes the three chapters seem to be off the subject. In fact, Cather uses a writing skill to serve as a foil to the development of Alexandra's characteristics. Alexandra begins to identify with women and nature in this stage; however, she still has not breached the bondage of patriarchal ideology.

Alexandra's relationship with nature now is greatly different from that of the previous stage. In the previous stage her attitude toward nature is strongly masculinist style of business management, but now the seeming tune of the relationship with nature is love and even identification. The detailed case is displayed in her intimate relationship with the land in the three chapters of the novel. In the ecofeminist sense the identification with nature is very significant because it shows love and takes nature no more as the debased out-group ("other"). She has gradually accepted her identification with nature.

At the same time Alexandra's attitude toward women has also changed a little. She begins to accept the female "other" in herself and has different reactions to the same dream from her girlhood. In this stage, she dreams more and more of being lifted by a man's arms

and her reaction of that is not the severe objection like before. It is an evidence of her awakening of sexual awareness which is a physiological need to woman. Moreover, she makes friends with Marie who is a very charming Bohemian woman and her attitude toward Maire also manifests her relationship with women. Her affiliation with Ivar also has changed greatly compared with the previous period. She has established feminine commune values such as love, caring and understanding. However, in light of ecofeminism, Alexandra's attachment to Marie is still confined to patriarchy or androcentrism in nature. It is no doubt that Alexandra has characteristics of budding and growth of femininity in this period.

A. Incomplete Identification with Femininity

1. Affiliation with Marie and Ivar

During her womanhood, Alexandra's close female friend is Marie who is a very charming Bohemian woman. In the second stage of development of Alexandra's character, Marie has made a great impact on her. Alexandra begins to accept female "other" in herself which differs from the previous period. Alexandra's relationship with Marie represents her attitude to women. However, using ecofeminist theory to analyze the typical figure Marie and her affiliation with Alexandra, we can see that Alexandra's identification with femininity is still incomplete.

Marie is a real feminine character who represents nature in the novel. She is another highest representative of nature the same as Ivar. If Ivar returns to nature in terms of living style, then Marie integrates with nature emotionally. She is the descendant of Bohemians and is as naive and enthusiastic as Bohemians. The reason why she has bought Alexandra's farm is that she likes the orchard there. Her life credendum is making the best of things and enjoying herself. She arouses interest to any little things. She is very friendly with neighbors and is very popular among them. She is an ideal woman character. This can be seen in the following aspects.

Firstly, she is a symbol of nature and supreme feminine figure. Both her appearance and character are closely connected with nature. She uses poppies to trim her hat and even her face looks like a poppy, round and brown, with rich color in her cheeks and lips, and her

dancing yellow-brown eyes bubbles with gayety. She is spontaneously and naturally affectionate. It indicates that Marie's femininity and her resemblance to nature as the flower is frequently associated with the earth and fertility goddess. The colors that are most frequently used to describe her are colors of the ripening field, the earth and flowers. She is like a little brown rabbit. The association between Marie and nature is femininity. She is especially energetic and stimulated by nature itself when she is with the flower and summer rain.

Secondly, she worships nature. She likes trees and believes that the tree understands and knows her every thought. Her faith in trees is much like a religion. As she mentions, the Bohemians are "tree worshipers before the missionaries came"²⁶ although she claims to be a good Christian, Marie can get along with caring trees if she hasn't anything else. It shows a kind of ancient practices of tree worship. The trees become the spiritual friends with whom she may communicate.

I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do. I feel as if this tree knows everything I ever think of when I sit here. When I come back to it, I never have to remind it of anything; I begin just where I left off.²⁷

At last, she has sympathy for nature/animals. In the novel, there is a scene describing Emil and Marie looking for ducks on the pond and Emil mercilessly shoots some ducks dead: Marie cries in distress when she witnesses those wild ducks killed by Emil. At this point she shares the same principle with Ivar that wild things are too happy to kill. Marie's feminine sympathy with nature presents a sharp contrast with Emil's masculinist imposition of the "self" upon nature. In Emil's eyes, the ducks exist only for being used by man. At this point, he is very similar to his two brothers who want to kill the birds when they visit Ivar's place with Alexandra in the first chapter of the novel. Marie's sympathy is regarded as unreasonable and crazy by him. Outraged, Emil mocks that Marie is "as bad as Ivar."²⁸ Emil's killing of the ducks foreshadows the death of Marie when his laughing delightedly transforms vivid wild life into a ball of feathers with blood. Women and nature, always embodying each other, here are destroyed by men.

Lovely and feminine as Marie is, her family life is very unhappy. Marie is born energetic, lively and pleasant, but obedient, compromising and indecisive in nature. Her life is very miserable, but she never gives up and she tries her best to be happy and merry. Disappointed and despaired in her sullen husband Frank, she does never wallow in negative feelings nor complain with her friends. On such occasions, she would stay in her orchard communicating with the wild life. One morning Frank complains of the wet ground and drives over to Sainte-Agnes. She is attached to the sparkling and rippling orchard. After the rain everything is beautiful and the wild roses smell spicier. Although she looks flighty in Emil's eyes, she regains life when she is close to nature. She learns to choke back real feelings even in front of her lover. "It's exciting to see everything growing so fast"²⁹ It seems that she could swallow insults and humiliation and recover soon after being embraced in nature. As an independent woman, Marie breaks away from domestic chores. Although she proves to be an expert in housekeeping, she never allows herself to be bounded. She knows how to keep plants from freezing, and she can make a dozen kinds of bread. Her ability to manage the house keeping impresses Alexandra and Alexandra is influenced by her trying to imitate her, which differs greatly from Alexandra's characteristic in the previous period.

Of course Alexandra and Marie have different temperaments respectively of their own.

They made a pretty picture in the strong sunlight, the leafy pattern surrounding them like a net; the Swedish woman (Alexandra) so white and gold, kindly and amused, but armored in calm, and the alert brown one, (Marie) her full lips parted, points of yellow light dancing in her eyes as she laughed and chattered.³⁰

From the above description we can see that Marie is very active, pleasant, full of vigor and enthusiasm. Alexandra is very calm and rational. Alexandra's relationship with Marie reflects pastoral's indistinct attitude toward woman. To this passionate female, Alexandra responds with great enthusiasm at first. Affiliating with Marie who is active and enthusiastic Alexandra perceives feminine identity and temperament further. She begins to coruscate this kind of temperament due to femininity gradually. There exists deep emotional contact between them. They have formed a female space quite similar to "the sisterhood". To

Alexandra, Marie is a companion to whom she can speak of anything frankly. Marie teaches Alexandra to put rosemary leaves in the chest to be sweet and feminine. They go to church and patch, pierce, and quilt together; Alexandra imitates Marie and plugs beautiful wild flower into her hair. More than that, Alexandra from the intuition of a woman senses out and sympathizes with Marie's emotional ordeal caused by her rude husband Frank. So if we analyze their relationship according to the idea of ecofeminism, it tallies with ecofeminism's principle that understanding and sympathy between the women are quite progressive in moral. It has broken down egoism and foster compassion. Emotional communication marks the deepening of "sisterhood" and establishment of women community with feminine commune values such as love, care and understanding. The development of these female personalities, to Alexandra, is really a great change, which shows her conquest of male centeredness in the pioneering period.

However, from the perspective of ecofeminism their relationship is not able to establish a Utopia away from the patriarchal culture. At this period Alexandra's identification with female personality has a baseline; it is still limited to some degree. Once it touches a forbidden zone of the patriarchal order, her awareness of women community would be crushed into pieces. This women community is too fragile to go through any real test. When Marie expresses her dissatisfaction with her marriage, Alexandra immediately shrinks away from the topic. Her sympathy fails at Marie's plea for emotional support. "The mere fact that Marie was Shabata's wife, for Alexandra, settles everything." "No good, she reasoned, ever come from talking about such things."³¹

Gonick Vivian points out the essence of the two women's conflict:

It is she (Marie), trapped in an unhappy marriage, who remains sexually alive and dangerously discontented on the clear lovely farmland Alexandra has created, she who tosses the blot onto the sunny composition, she who cripples Alexandra's self-belief, leaves her brooding and confused. So Alexandra is like the sun but Marie is like the sunspot.³²

That is to say, Alexandra belongs to Apollo's order of rational world, which oppresses Bacchus' passion; But Marie's self-expression is female sexuality which bears the

characteristic of obvious revel. It brings a subversive threatening to cultural order (marriage).

Above comment made by Gonick concentrates on the conflict between (human) nature and culture which is represented by Marie and Alexandra respectively. In the eyes of Marie that human nature is the subversive female sexuality and it is impossible to be included in a meaningless marriage. Judging from her case, her love affairs with Emil is reproachless. But Alexandra is the one who represents something like the sun and chooses the order of rational world thus oppresses the passionate emotional world. In patriarchal system culture does not allow the freedom of sexuality especially that of a female's to maintain the base and order of marriage.

For ecofeminism human bodies are not as static sites of cultural inscription alone, but thresholds where nature and culture dissolve, sites where domination can be constantly resisted, where transformations can continuously occur, and where constructions of race, gender, environment, and society can be transgressively critiqued. Reclaiming the body is important work, particularly since human (male) identity has been equated with the mind alone, and the body has been variously raced, animalized, feminized, and naturalized in order to be seen as inferior and antagonistic to the process of culture. During Marie and Emil's love affairs in the orchard, Marie has completely integrated herself with the flowers and trees around her. The orchard has become a closed space for sex ceremony under the moonlight. Here the moon, flowers and trees as well as the closed space are all symbols of femininity.

However, Alexandra can not give support to Marie in emotional world because her direction of life is cultural order. According to androcentric view, culture is superior to nature, mind to body. So in light of ecofeminism, Alexandra's affiliation with Marie is still male-centered value to some extent. Alexandra still can not get rid of bondage of patriarchy: She has never explored emotional questions with Marie because she discriminates her in this field and takes it for granted that they do not belong to the same group. Alexandra is never very communicative about her own affairs, and when she comes to the point, an instinct tells her that about such things she and Marie will not understand one another. Alexandra also blames the marriage crisis between Marie and Frank on Marie alone. She lacks understanding of Marie but feels sympathy to Frank who is a husband of jealousy and cruelty as well as having androcentrism. It is obvious that the consciousness of patriarchy in her deepening

inner heart results in her different manners and thoughts to Marie and Frank. So her thoughts and manners display her incomplete identification with femininity.

Furthermore, Alexandra has also established a profound friendship with Ivar mentioned in the first chapter. It promotes her to transform her natural concept and give birth to ecological sense. In ecofeminism sense that everything in the world is whole interrelated together, there is no born class discrimination and the true love for nature is to oppose any form of oppression. Ivar unites himself with nature and he becomes a symbol of nature. At the first stage, Alexandra respects him and takes his advice to operate the farm because of her egoism. But at the second stage of her development of characteristic she is guided by Ivar's spiritual direction and influenced by him greatly. It shows her caring for and understanding of him. When Ivar loses his land through mismanagement, Alexandra takes him in as a member of her household ever since. Alexandra knows he dislikes human habitations, so she has fitted him up a room in the barn, where he is very comfortable, being near the horses. Alexandra's brother Lou suggested sending Ivar away to the asylum because he despises him as a disgraceful object for his eccentric behaviors. As Ivar contests,

But that is not the way of this country. The way here is for all to do alike. I am despised because I do not wear shoes, because I don not cut my hair, and because I have visions. ... But here if a man is different in his feet or in his head, they put him in the asylum. ... That is the way: they have built the asylum for people who are different, and they will not even let us live in the holes with the badgers.³³

Regarding this issue, Alexandra is open-minded and kind and she spares no efforts to save poor Ivar from the possible prosecutions. She thinks that Ivar has just as much rights to his own way of dressing and thinking as the rich people have.

Apart from caring and understanding to Ivar, Alexandra also respects him very much. She not only takes his advice on treating living creatures and nature well but also accepts his many notions. In return, Ivar also proves to be a big help to her. In the bosom of the silent land, Alexandra begins to brood her point of view of nature and communicate with it intimately: her residence is like an immense garden and she likes listening to the sounds of nature.

Anyhow, we can witness Alexandra's transformation of her exploring to female identity through her affiliation with Marie and Ivar. But in any case, her characteristics still exist limitation to reach a perfect woman analyzing it from the view of ecofeminism. Just as Nelson Robert remarks that "No matter how Alexandra resumes her lost language, that's not her wholeness."³⁴

2. Abandoning Patriarchal Ideology and the Heroine's Awakening

Ecofeminists points out the root of oppression to nature and women are patriarchal ideology. In this novel, Alexandra's brother Osar and Lou are typical representatives bearing patriarchal ideology. They stick to the old convention and lack of innovational consciousness. Led and helped by their sister Alexandra, they have established the family of their own respectively and lead a platitudinous and rich life. However, they not only do not appreciate their sister's help but also ask their sister to leave all the property of the family to them. They take it for granted that only men should be the real masters of the family, the property earned by their sister should be dominated by them. Oscar ever neglects legal force claiming that "The property of a family really belongs to the men of the family, no matter about the title. If anything goes wrong, it's the men that are held responsible."³⁵ Alexandra's chiding of justice renders them speechless. The two brothers have their families and enjoy the bliss of the marriage, but they turn a blind eye to the fact that Alexandra leads a very lonely life with Carl and Marie as her only friends. They are selfish and greedy disregarding their sister's emotion and dignity. Intervening the emotion between Alexandra and Carl rudely they mock her to get married at the age of 40 will be ridiculous. Despite all Alexandra's efforts for many year to manage the farm and create property for the family, in spite of her sacrifice and kindness, her family members, particularly the male members, won't care a little for her happiness, such as marriage. Even Alexandra's dearest younger brother Emil who loves his sister sincerely can not fully understand her. When Mairie mentions Alexandra's close relation with Carl to him in the orchard, he laughs and thrusts his hands into his trousers pockets saying, "Alexandra's never been in love ... She wouldn't know how to go about it. The idea!"³⁶ Emil returns home after his two brothers' quarreling with Alexandra, he neglects her sister's feelings and is so careless that he does not notice her sister's face swollen from crying. When Alexandra tells

Emil she wants to change her way of living, he is a little ashamed for his sister though he has tried not to show it. He thinks it seems a little bit ridiculous for her sister to marry Carl at the age of nearly 40 years old.

Although Carl is the only man who can understand and appreciate Alexandra best, he also can not get rid of the bondage of patriarchal ideology. Thinking that the contrast of his poverty and Alexandra's richness is the biggest barrier between him and Alexandra, he tells Alexandra he can not be together with her until he has something to offer her. Alexandra is very sad and disappointed, saying that "What good comes of offering people things they don't need? I don't need money. But I have needed you for a great many years. I wonder why I have been permitted to prosper, if it is only to take my friends away from me."³⁷

Thus, the event that Alexandra intends to get married at 40 is like a relentless bright mirror, reflecting all kinds of oppression and prejudice from which women suffer a great deal from different layers of society. Under such circumstance, Alexandra has been clear conscious of the kinds of inequality in patriarchal system. She is no longer the representative of patriarchal ideology because she has realized she will become the victim of it, she will be hurt by it greatly. It is certain that she is reluctant to be oppressed by patriarchy. As a member of the family and as well as an independent woman, she defends her due power and interest in the family determinedly. To some degree, it is also a dissatisfaction and rebellion to the world view of patriarchy. In a sense, "getting married event" becomes a precondition for Alexanddra to change her characteristics.

In the patriarchal society, "the sexual distribution of political authority and economic power tends either to place women at the bottom of the status system or to exclude them entirely."³⁸ In this novel, the destruction of patriarchal ideology to women is also embodied in Marie's emotional relationship with two men Frank (husband) and Emil (lover). Marie is not a woman who could live without loving. It is not easy for Frank to go after and marry Marie. Before getting married, Marie worships him as God and admires him greatly, has been his slave. But after they get married the situation is different. Marie finds out her idol is a male chauvinist, jealous, violent and conceited. Frank's firm belief about marriage is that the authority resides with the husband who is God's representative with the family and then he requires his wife not to care about another living thing in the world but just himself. The

distance between them has widened and hardened. He is jealous about everything, his farm, and his horses and his pretty wife. Jealous of Maire for being universally agreeable, he intends to crush her spirit. Although he knows that Marie is an unsophisticated and self-respecting woman, he can not bear to be eclipsed by her wife's brightness. He is always finding a quarrel in straw and tends to be in indignant. Just as Alexandra describes him " Frank is so conceited that to get on with him, you have got to make a fuss over him and act as if you thought he was a very important person all the times, and different from other people."³⁹ Facing the unhappy marriage Marie has not courage and strength to leave Frank. She stoops to compromise to her marriage only to find that her spirit is repressed more and more, her life is more vacuous and she becomes lonely enough. As to Frank, he thinks he has the right to behave in whatever he pleases. Women, in his eyes, are innately inferior and should therefore be at the mercy of men. Although he loves her wife very much, his self-center thought leads him to the suspect of Marie involuntarily. Peering through the hedge of the orchard at two dark figures, he fires three times without stopping and without hesitation shooting Marie and Emil in this way. So understood from the ecofeminism view, Marie is killed by patriarchal ideology rather than Frank the person.

Marie and Emil's romantic love is from the beginning doomed to destruction because their love is full of passion and possessive desire. Although Emil has accepted college education and widens his mind, his love for Marie is also destructive. Male's controlled desire urges him to come down on his unburdening of love to Marie continually; it makes Marie indulge into a great suffering before he realizes it. Marie thinks if she can not share her lover's life it is too painful. So she lingers herself between the unharmonious marriage and fiery love. She tells Emil her two emotional experiences are from her sincere heart and she has paid much for them. She can not escape her due paying in order to be joyous. To Marie the life without passion will be bored and meaningless. The future life without seeing Emil will be unimaginable. When Emil decides to leave the village to start his brand new life, Marie ponders her future life in this way:

The years seemed to stretch before her like the land; spring, summer, autumn, winter, spring; always the same patient fields, the patient little trees, the patient lives; always the same yearning, the same

pulling at the chain- until the instinct to live has torn itself and bled and weakened for the last time, until the chain secured a dead woman, who might cautiously be released. “⁴⁰

Here, the chain is a symbol of patriarchal ideology and Marie is chained by it. It is this spiritual chain that kills Marie and Emil.

In spite of all Marie’s effort to avoid hurting either of the two men, eventually her happiness is destroyed in the hand of them who both intend to possess her for their own. However, the two men’s different behaviors have similar reasons. The male’s controlling desire always drives them want to rein nature and dominate women, this is the root of patriarchal ideology to women. It seems that death has enabled Marie to get freedom completely. She has dragged herself back to his lover’s side. She has lifted her head to her lover’s breast, taken his hand in both her own hands. She is lying on her right side in an easy and natural position, her cheek on Emi’s shoulder. On her face there is a look of ineffable content. But Emil’s brows are drawn in a frown, as if he realizes that something has befallen him. He can not get spiritual peace up till his death.

The tragedy of Marie and Emil touches Alexandra greatly. She has realized the true appearance of patriarchal society gradually and has a different attitude toward marriage. On marriage not only Marie but also herself have become the victim of patriarchal system. It likes a thunderstorm to wake her from sleeping. Although there is budding and growth femininity in her inner heart, she has no practical action to oppose the patriarchal society to perfect her incomplete identity with femininity. However, the development of her characteristic is establishing a firm foundation for her further transformation of personality.

B. Recognition of Nature

1. Significance of Land to the Heroine

In the second stage of Alexandra’s development of characteristic, her relationship with nature has changed from exploring and conquering way to respecting way, because it is the land that makes her achieve great success and she has realized the great significance of the land to her. So among the numerous pioneers only Alexandra can fully understand the land

and own it. Therefore she can truly respect the land and shows friendliness to it and other creatures. In return, the land has unusual significance to Alexandra.

Alexandra is a keen observer of her natural environment. Sixteen years later her love for the beauty of nature can be detected from her farm and garden, which are in order and have fine arrangement. There are so many sheds and outbuildings groups about the house that the place looks not unlike a tiny village. A stranger, approaching it, can not help noticing the beauty and fruitfulness of the outlying fields. Osage orange, mulberry, timothy grass, willows and walnut trees in the farm and garden shows a most unusual trimness and care for detail. "Alexandra's big house is curiously unfinished and uneven in comfort: One room is papered, carpeted, over-furnished; the next is almost bare."⁴¹ These sharp contrast descriptions between the well-managed fields and garden and the poorly-arranged house gives the readers an impression that Alexandra's the house is the big out-of-doors and that it is in the soil that she expresses her best. With her great success in the land, the great prairie and the open sky mean a real life for Alexandra; it is the beauty of the land that makes her pleased and satisfied.

... Carl who is Alexandra's close friend is very surprised at the great change of her farm after he returns to the Divide. He says to her, "I've been thinking how strangely things works out. I've been away engraving other men's pictures, and you've stayed at home and made your own...How in the world have you done it?..."⁴² Alexandra's answer is just and objective,

We hadn't any of us much to do with it, Carl. The land did it. It had its little joke. It pretended to be poor because nobody knew how to work it right; and then, all at once, it worked itself. It woke up out of its sleep and stretched itself, and it was so big, so rich, that we suddenly found we were rich, just from sitting still...⁴³

At that time the land has become an intimate partner of the human beings and there is harmonious scene between the land and the human beings everywhere.

There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a

single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the sheath, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness. There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country, The air and the earth are curiously mated and intermingled, as if the one were the breath of the other. You feel in the atmosphere the same tonic puissant quality that is in the filth, the same strength and resoluteness.⁴⁴

Alexandra has acute intuition to the land, she is plowing the land with mood of love and yearning rather than conquering it like the previous stage. By doing in this way it is natural that she becomes the rich farmer in the land. The land rewards Alexandra's loyalty with great success.

The great success resulting from the land provides mighty economic support for Alexandra. This success wins her economic independence and provides her a guarantee in the family power. She gets rid of the heroines' tragedy occurring in Cather's other novels because of their dependence on men. Therefore it is the land that makes her exert her right. Every Sunday she sits at the head of her family's table surrounded by her nieces and nephews. Apart from food, she also provides them the gifts of civilization for the young generation, such as a piano for her niece Milly. Economic independence consolidates Alexandra's position in the family, reinforces her will and strength, and ensures her right to maintain her dignity when her two greedy brothers try to interfere with her relationship with Carl. She knows how to use law to protect her property right. When they threaten to take her land away and hold out "Property of a family really belongs to the men of the family, because they are held responsible, and because they do the work"⁴⁵ She remains calm and just asks them to go to the country clerk and ask him who owns the land, and whether her titles are good.

As mentioned above the land grants Alexandra great power as well as economic independence. Alexandra, in return, knows how to respect it, taking it as a friend to love and cooperate with instead of an object to possess and to conquer. Her intuitive love for the land develops into a self-conscious respect and worship for it.

The relationship between Alexandra and the land does not only limit on economic

beneficial level. From a deeper perspective, it also a spiritual partner to Alexandra. When she faces difficulty and misunderstandings of the others it is the land that offers her comfort and consolation as well as warmth. The case can be proved by her relationship with Carl when he returns to the Divide after sixteen years. Although Alexandra is rich, beautiful, independent and intelligent, she is labeled as unsuitable for marriage by her two greedy and selfish brothers, Oscar and Lou. They not only hold prejudice towards women but also have evil intentions of their own. When they find their sister's intimate relationship with Carl they are afraid that the marriage of Alexandra and Carl may threaten their children inheriting Alexandra's property. They quarrel with Alexandra and even attack their own sister with insulting and ill-natured words such as "old woman", "hard" and "conceited". They complain about Alexandra like these words "This is what comes for letting a woman meddle in business..... You can't do business with women." ⁴⁶ As to Carl, he also can not get rid of the mundane prejudice and take measures to escape the fact that he loves Alexandra deeply. What he can do is to leave her in difficulty and bitterness because he is afraid to become a focus of being discussed by others. In the eyes of most men, Alexandra has no right to change her way of living. Because they think in a patriarchal society, such a powerful and independent woman as Alexandra is considered unsuitable to marry, and actually no man is outstanding enough to be able to match her in intelligence and power. Therefore, without spiritual and physical male partner it is natural for Alexandra to join herself to the land, taking it as her soul partner. Isolated by all the men around her, Alexandra feels helpless, lonely and painful, she has to seek comfort and transcend her agony in her inner heart. The land, her best friend and her soul partner, accepts and embraces her with passion. By this time, the land is no longer a silent lifeless object, but an intimate friend who understands her, consoles her.

2. Happy Memory on Intoxicating Nature

In addition to an intimate relationship with the land Alexandra often intoxicates herself in the beauty of the nature; she learns to appreciate the sweetness and grandness of the nature. One of the happiest days in her memory is the time when she goes to see a wild duck on the bank of the river with her little brother Emil. There is such a day when they are down on the river in the dry year, looking over the land. They make an early start one morning and drive a long way

before noon. When Emil says he is hungry, they draw back from the road and climb up to the top of a grassy bluff to eat their lunch under the shade of some little elm trees. The river is clear there, and shallow, since there has been no rain and it runs in ripples over the sparkling sand. Under the overhanging willows of the opposite bank there is an inlet where the water is deeper and flows so slowly that it seems in the sun. In this little bay a single wild duck is swimming and diving and preening her feathers, disporting herself very happily in the flickering light and shade. They sit for a long time, watching the solitary bird take its pleasure. No living thing has ever seemed to Alexandra as beautiful as that wild duck. "Years afterward she thought of the duck as still there, swimming and diving all by herself in the sunlight, a kind of enchanted bird that did not know age or change."⁴⁷ Alexandra loves nature and the living creatures in nature so much that she can introject with it and experience the peculiar beauty of it. Her memory of a wild duck in the pond is tender and loving; she has recognized the beauty of that most beautiful living bird. At the same time, her memory of a wild duck also represents her feminine aspects, "because it is one of the water birds sacred to the Great Mother as well as one of the natural symbols".⁴⁸ This symbol combines femininity and nature. At this stage Alexandra's characteristics differs greatly from that of the previous stage and it is a great transformation comparing with her formal attitude. It shows her concern and cherish to nature (a wild duck). It coincides with the relationship between women and nature which is actually emphasized by ecofeminism. Child, nature (a wild duck), and women, the three roles are unified and all of them act as the "other" to the adult men. So by using ecofeminism view to look at Alexandra, she accepts "a wild duck" and treasures it up in her memory. Her reaction to a "wild duck" makes an obvious contrast to a detail happened at the beginning of the novel when little Emil and his kitten is in trouble:

On the sidewalk in front of one of the stores sat a little Swede boy, crying bitterly...He was afraid to stop anyone, afraid to go into the store and ask for help, so he sat wringing his long sleeves and looking up a telegraph pole beside him, whispering, ' my kitten, oh, my kitten! Her will fweeze!' At the top of the pole crouched a shivering gray kitten, mewing faintly and clinging desperately to the wood with her claws...⁴⁹

At that time Alexandra does not show any maternal gentleness to little Emil and kitten, instead she blames them for bringing the trouble for her. According to ecofeminism her

reaction reflects reason's indifference toward sensibility and human's toward nature. Here kitten is the creature of the nature; it also belongs to nature as the wild duck does. By contrasting Alexandra's different reactions to "the kitten" and "a wild duck" we can understand that her characteristic has developed and changed gradually. From rejecting and being indifferent to nature to identifying with nature she has made a great progress. She no longer regards nature as the "other" to reject and conquer as the previous stage. According to the view of ecofeminism, her progress has a great significance to certain extent.

However, despite the apparent harmony between her and nature, Alexandra sometimes feels that the land is a responsibility and a burden. Alexandra's identification with nature and closeness to it is still restrained because of her characteristics. Her feminine coexistence with nature is incomplete at the moment. Masculinist ideology still lingers in her. She hasn't realized the intrinsic value of land. When Carl returns to the Divide they talk about their experience of their own in the sixteen years, Carl gives his account of city life, from which he thinks he is a failure in the city. But Alexandra expresses her admiration to Carl because of his freedom and says she'd rather have had his freedom than her land. She thinks if the world were no wider than her cornfield, if there were not something besides this, she wouldn't feel that it was much worth while to work. She even claims her aim of plowing is for the outside world and enable her little brother Emil to get rid of the land. The land is still a means to her not an aim. There is a dialogue between Emil and Alexandra when Emil tells her sister that he does not want to go away to law school and want to take another year off to look around, she says "very well, Emil. Only don't go off looking land."⁵⁰ From their dialogue we can see Alexandra's inner heart. Loving land is not enough; maybe the colorful world in the outside is more excellent than only living in the land. So she has loaded her dream on his youngest brother Emil and pours all her love and hope to him whom she has sent to college. She wants him to seek a new life in the outside to get rid of the bondage of the land. Although Alexandra love the land deeply in this period, her love for it is still a kind of instrumentalism whereby things are valued only to the extent that they are useful to Man. So in the view of the ecofeminism the sense of "mutual dependence" between Alexandra and nature has not yet fully achieved at this stage.

Chapter Three

Daughter of Nature: Reconstruction of Femininity

The last stage of the development of Alexandra's femininity is mainly reflected in the last chapter of the novel "Alexandra". The tragedy of Emil and Marie deeply affects Alexandra. For three month she seems to be quiet out of her mind, with no head about anything, and has to be told when to eat and when to bed. The tragedy makes her reconsider her former attitude toward their passion. She also finds it hard to blame the murderer Frank Shabatta because she often feels that she herself has been more to blame than poor Frank. So she has a resolution to go to see Frank who is in State Penitentiary in Lincoln. The two events occurring in this chapter are "being struck by a storm in the graveyard" and "being back on the homestead to reunion with her lover". The two events have promoted Alexandra to form her ecological and natural point of view and return her female worlds as well as her female identity. Thus she has achieved herself a transformation to a perfect femininity. Furthermore, Alexandra has a new understanding of the land; she has introjected herself with the land closely. She has carried out her sublimation of her life value through unprecedented communication with the land. In a sense, she becomes an embodiment of the land mother thus finishes her transformation eventually to a perfect woman in ecofeminist sense.

A. Identifying with Nature

The last part of the novel begins with a scene of a heavy rain. Ivar and Alexandra's maid Signa can not find her at home and they are very worried about her. They come to Emi's grave and find Alexandra wet all over. She goes to visit the graveyard late at night and comes across a heavy rain. This scene has a particular importance in the whole novel. According to ecofeminism, rainwater is always the ultimate symbol of nature and body fluid of mother, so it is Alexandra's most direct experience with nature. This scene symbolizes a baptism of her soul and it is also a melting of her androcentrism in nature (mother's body). Direct immersion in the rain in the graveyard is a prelude for Alexandra to identify with nature completely. As she tells old Ivar,

I think it has done me good to get cold clear through like this once... After once you get cold clear through, the feeling of the rain on you is sweet. It seems to bring back feelings you had when you were a baby. It carried you back into the dark, before you were born; you can't see things, but they come to you somehow, and you know them and aren't afraid of them.⁵¹

Rain is fairy of nature and the symbol of baby is a kind of neonatal strength. The symbol of baby also strengthens the conciliation of nature that is like a loving mother. Just as Ivar says when the eyes of the flesh are shut the eyes of the spirit are open. She will have a message from those who are gone, and that will bring her peace...Cao Jinghua interprets the scene of graveyard as follows,

Her (Alexandra) exposure to the rain in the graveyard is a sort of sea journey that she has to undergo before a rebirth in greater wisdom and self-knowledge. Alexandra's immersion in the water indicates both a regressive desire of coming back into the womb, and the desire to renew her strength from the origin and source of all created life, for spiritual rebirth.⁵²

The above comment makes a reasonable analysis of the symbolic meaning of this rain scene. In detail, as far as I know the "the greater wisdom" and "spiritual rebirth" is a kind of expression of Alexandra's giving up her masculinist sense and acceptance of ecofeminist thought. It is the image of a baby in the womb that shows symbolically the dissolution of a dominating self over nature and a tendency of blending with it. Here nature is also regarded as female. But nature is no longer the passive other to be oppressed by a masculine "self" but a dependent "self" which is an active other to be contained. The relationship of human beings and nature is very harmonious instead of the opposite. Because of the baby's identification utterly with the maternal body, Alexandra's feeling like a baby also reflects a complete identification with concerning femaleness. At last Alexandra obtains an ecofeminist understanding of nature and becomes the human counterpart of land. As she admits, she would like to see other places but never to stay away from the Divide forever. She is closely

linked with the land and is assimilated by it. Now for her, freedom lies in its soil.

After the event of the graveyard, Alexandra's house is just like a female Utopia where it is full of caring, understanding and sister friendship. Because of catching a serious cold from the rain, Alexandra has to lie in bed receiving care from Ivar and Signa. These two figures have obvious feminine personalities and characteristic, who are ready to give people comfort and support. Now Alexandra's house has become a containing feminine space where it is a symbol of maternal care, or in a sense the house is another image of womb:

When they got home, Signa had a fire burning in the sitting-room stove. She undressed Alexandra and gave her a hot footbath, while Ivar made ginger tea in the kitchen. When Alexandra was in bed, wrapped in hot blankets, Ivar came in with his tea and saw that she drank it. Signa asked permission to sleep on the slat lounge outside her door...

And Alexandra keeps in bed for several days, and it is during that time that she begins to have new understanding of female personality especially at the aspect of female sexual desire. Alexandra can in a measure realize that Marie is, after all, Marie; not merely a "married woman" and Marie should have the right to seek her happiness. Owing to this realization, Alexandra begins to turn her attention to her depressed emotional world:

As she lay with her eyes closed, she had again, more vividly than for many years, the old illusion of her girlhood, of being lifted and carried lightly by some one very strong. He was with her a long while this time, and carried her very far, and in his arms she felt free pain. When he laid her down on her bed again, she opened her eyes, and for the first time, she saw him, saw him clearly, though the room was dark, and his face was covered. He was standing in the doorway of her room. His white cloak was thrown over his face, and his head was bent a little forward. His shoulders seemed as strong as the foundations of the world. His right arm, bared from the elbow, was dark and gleaming, like bronze, and she knew at once that it was the arm of the mightiest of all lovers. She knew at last for whom it was she had waited, where he would carry her. That, she told herself, was very well...⁵⁴

Therefore, according to the dream, for the first time in Alexandra's life, she yields most

willingly to her innermost passion, and stops feeling ashamed and angry for this. She not only understands female sexuality happening in Marie but also in herself. She begins to admit her need of a lover. This promotes her to change into a real “woman”.

Alexandra resumes her health very quickly and continues to experience her journey of spiritual spallation—to go to the State Penitentiary to see Frank. That former handsome Bohemian lad has changed so greatly that she can scarcely recognize him. His face is already bleached to a chalk gray. His lips are colorless, his fine teeth looks yellowish. He even forgets English and doesn't know how to speak it. That guy whose number is 1037 shows repentance to his crime of abusing and killing his wife. He tells Alexandra his only wish is to go back where he comes from and to see his mother after he goes out of the prison. The great change of Frank's character urges Alexandra to produce an awakening consciousness to leave the prison at once and be back to her homestead. Later, Alexandra is back on the Divide and reunions with Carl who returns from a far away place day and night. In a symbolic meaning, being back to her homestead is a complete retreating of her male selfness and a complete returning of her female selfness.

B. Re-evaluating the Significance of Land

At the last chapter of the novel, Alexandra has a new understanding of the land, which is more far-reaching than before. Here, the land is a kind of spiritual guider for her. After coming crossing a heavy rain in the graveyard, Alexandra goes back home. As she lies alone on the bed in the dark, it occurs to her for the first time that perhaps she is actually tired of life. She longs to be free from her own body, which “aches” and is so “heavy”. When she closes her eyes to repose, the old illusion of her girlhood appears again. It's more vividly than for many years-being lifted and carried lightly by some one very strong. He is with her a long while this time, and carries her very far, and in his arms she feels free from pain.

According to critic Matthias Schubnell, “the man in Alexandra's illusion is the god of the land, god who is a supernatural to balance human being's life and death, fertility of crops and poor harvest, youth and consenescence.”⁵⁵ In the past illusion Alexandra could feel that he was yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him. But this time the illusion is different,

for the first time in her life, she saw him, saw him clearly, though the room was dark, and his face was covered. ... His shoulders seemed as strong as the foundations of the world. His right arm, bared from the elbow, was dark and gleaming, like bronze... She knew at last for whom it was she had waited, and where he would carry her.⁵⁶

All these descriptions of the illusion illustrates that “he” is an embodiment of the land god. “He” comes to help Alexandra and brings her out of the desperate predicament. “He” makes Alexandra realize that only the land is human beings’ final end-result. Since life is unabiding, there is no reason not to live a pleasant life. Through guided by the land god, Alexandra forgives Frank remissively at last. Thus, she also obtains the inner peace in her heart. Guided by the spirit of the land god, Alexandra gets rebirth and starts her new life.

After experiencing a baptism of life and death, Alexandra has more deep understanding of the land which is under her feet. She not only loves it very much but also feels its grandness. When she finishes her visiting Frank from Lincoln and is back on the Divide, she feels something like she did when she drove back with Emil from the river that time, in the dry year. She is glad to come back to it. It is the land that makes her feel great peace and freedom. Carl is very clear about Alexandra’s personality and says to her “You belong to the land, as you have always said. No more than ever.”⁵⁷ When they walk abreast on the land again, Alexandra says meaningfully,

Lou and Oscar can’t see those things. Suppose I do will my hand to their children, what difference will that make? The land belongs to the future, Carl; that’s the way it seem to me. How many of the names on the country clerk’s plat will be there in fifty years? I might as well try to will the sunset over there to my brother’s children. We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it –for a little while.⁵⁸

Alexandra’s comment on the land shows her real integration with nature. That means she has got rid of all derogatory color. The most significant thing is that the dual image of mother (nature) and daughter (Alexandra) are closely related to each other as well as depends on

each other, inheriting the female of breeding life and circulating. If we analyze Alexandra's comment from the idea of ecofeminism, we will notice that her achievement of relationship with the land is that of ecofeminists. The core of ecofeminism is to propose mutual dependence as well as relative individuality. From the comment we can see that the land and human beings are not only acknowledged to be independent but also interconnected: because the truth is that the land is always there and people can own it for a while. On the basis of people's love and understanding of the land the relationship between them is mutual dependence.

About the new understanding of the land, Liaobera says,

Through intuition (maybe it is more reliable than our science and less limited by the language than our philosophy) we have known the indivisibility of the earth- its soil, mountains, rivers, forests climates, plants and animals. We respect the earth as a whole. We regard it as a vital existence rather than a useful servant. It will become old when the stars at dawn sing together; it is still very young when the last of us union with the elders at ghostdom."⁵⁹

So the land belongs to the future and human beings are only hasty passengers on it.

The last sentence of the novel depicts an ideal relationship between Alexandra and the land. "Fortunate country that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth." So Cather ends her novel in the description of the land again. Human beings as living individual also end a cycle here. At the complicated top of the land pyramid human beings are only one of the millions of living creatures. The land, nature, human beings living on the land and the other living creatures depend on each other and interconnect with each other in the community. The land contains everything living on it with its clement bosom and provides them a final end-result. Compared with the grandness of the land, human beings are only inappreciable living creatures living on it.

C. Regaining Woman's Power

Alexandra is affected by her realization of her relationship with the land and it

accelerates her to change into a real “woman”. The remarkable change of her is that she endeavors to understand female sexuality, the former “otherness”, not only in others (such as the passion between Emil and Marie) but also in herself. Because of the sexual illusion occurring in her dream, she begins to admit her need of a lover instead of feeling ashamed and angry for this as before. She realizes her emotional dependence on Carl and she acknowledges her love for him eventually. Carl, on his part, now overcomes his sense of financial inferiority and his fear of being judged a “loafer” by men like Oscar and Lou and returns because he knows he is needed.

But it should be noted that Alexandra’s identification with female identity is certainly not a going backward to the traditional female role because of her economic dependence and the strength of will born in herself just like her pioneering period. To ecofeminism, mutual dependence will not endanger individuality of any party and femininity enjoys the same status as masculinity. As a child friend, Carl understands Alexandra quite well. He fully respects her choice and understands her close attachment to the land so he will live on her land instead of carrying her away. She is still a subject with consciousness and power, not an object of male desire and yearning.

Because their marriage lays a solid foundation which is based on mutual understanding, caring and friendship, Alexandra and Carl will be very happy together. Their marriage constitutes a partnership founded after thoughtful consideration and friendship, so they understand each other and are ready to help each other. After they combine with each other, what they are going to do not accord with the expected gender role of their time. Their position of companionship in the family is equal because it is a new type of marriage different from the conventional one. Men’s wealth is the crux of the conventional marriage, so married women all fall appendage to wealthy men. Conventional women are in passive position and they feel contented in being a housewife. But we know Carl is financial inferiority than Alexandra in their marriage, so Alexandra and Carl’s new type of marriage provides alternatives to the traditional social conformities of American life..

Alexandra and Carl know their need for each other and will value that reunion much more through years tribulation. They will lead a harmonious life and there is no oppression in their marriage. As Harrison says, “Like all of Cather’s fiction, *O Pioneers!* leaves the reader

with a sense of community, of wholeness restored. Rejection mistrust has been offset by reunion and reassurance.”

The end of the novel presents a woman with an ideal character. Alexandra’s idea of nature and women are thoroughly ecological. Realizing the significance of interconnectedness between nature and human beings and mutual dependence among human beings, Alexandra transcends from her former “masculine” self to an ecological, spiritual self. The new spirituality that she achieves can be defined as ecofeminist spirituality.

Conclusion

Willa Cather's reputation has risen steadily since the 1970s with the booming of feminism and ecocriticism. It is no doubt that she is one of American's most outstanding writers. Traditionally, critics often study Cather's novel from theme of pioneering spirit and regional life. However, some critics have studied her frontier novels from the perspective of feminist traits and the ecological consciousness with the movements of feminism and ecocriticism.

The emergence of ecofeminism brings together the insights of both feminism and ecocriticism. Ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions of women is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. These two forms of oppression are interrelated, so ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. In light of such identification, ecofeminist literary criticism often offers a new perspective to examine the female writing of nature. Ecofeminists call for an independent and harmonious new type of relation between women, men, nature and all kinds of culture.

O Pioneers! qualifies as an ecofeminist text because Cather focuses on both women and nature in the novel. From the discussion of the relationship between the female protagonist-Alexandra Bergson and nature reflected in the novel *O Pioneers!*, we can get the conclusion that nature (land) both as human partner and spiritual guide has been emphasized. The heroine Alexandra has experienced a transformation from a masculine "conqueror" to feminine "self". Alexandra's ecological consciousness and feminine identity has developed further.

As early as in the 20th century, in order to capacitate her heroine to perform the task of taming the land, Willa Cather was bold enough to empower Alexandra. She endows her with many mental attributes, such as the power of reason, intelligence and adventurous spirit, which are restricted to women in the male culture. Alexandra appears to be more a woman of head than one of heart. So she is considered as a perfect combination of two sexes: powerful, intelligent, as well as tolerant and intuitive. In the novel of *O Pioneers!*, Willa Cather shows

more respect for women and nature. The relationship between women and nature is harmonious and it coincides with the theory of ecofeminism. Land is a living creature that has its own mood and can never be owned by anyone. Only those who can understand it, truly love it and cooperate with it in a friendly spirit, like Alexandra Bergson, can establish a mutual-dependent relationship with it.

This thesis tries to examine the image of Alexandra from the process of her character transformation. This perspective has been neglected so far by many critics. There are three periods for her to become a successful frontier woman who has established her feminine identity and achieved a sense of fulfillment. She has experienced periods of taming the wild land and overcoming self-limitations. From the very beginning of the novel, the appearance of Alexandra is completely that of a male conqueror though she is a tall, handsome girl with full figure, smooth white skin, fiery red hair, and clear, deep blue eyes. From her character and temperament, cross dressing and attitude to land, we can see she is a man wearing a female mask. She refuses her female identity and represses her sexual feelings. Her responsibility is to manage the family's homestead and inherits her father's way of managing the land so as to enable the whole family to have a prosperous life. Being different from the stereotyped weak women images in the past literature, Alexandra is an intelligent, powerful and independent woman image. She uses more heads-the symbol of reason and intelligence, than hands, the symbol of man's physical strength represented by Bergson and her two brothers, Lou and Oscar. Her attitude to the wild land is far from loving and respectful. So it is clear that her relationship with nature at the beginning is not in accordance with the central core of ecofeminism but a male-centered pioneering tradition. Later in the second period, with her great material success and becoming one of the richest farmers in the Divide region, her emotional world changes a little and her attitude toward nature is different from that at the very beginning. She shows ambivalent characteristics to identify with nature and female identity in her womanhood. The most important thing is that she is deeply influenced by the people around her, like Ivar and Marie who are true friends of nature. Alexandra's obvious change can be presented from her close relationship with the land as well as her relationship with Ivar and Marie. So she begins to learn how to establish a really harmonious relationship with nature. But still she has not broken through the bondage of patriarchal ideology. In the

last period, the tragedy occurring on her beloved brother Emil and her close friend Marie deeply affects her; she begins to reflect on her own limitations and has realized the true face of patriarchal ideology. Especially when she runs across a heavy rain at Emil's grave, her spirit has been reborn and it is her most direct experience with nature. She begins to feel the deep effect brought by nature and becomes more liberal about Emil and Marie's love. With Carl's returning to the Divide, Alexandra accelerates her transition towards integration and life renewal. She knows that she needs Carl and decides to get married with him. At the end of the novel, Alexandra not only integrates herself with feminine identity but also with nature.

Tracing the development of Alexandra's characteristic, this thesis attempts to offer a more comprehensive view of the woman-nature relationship in the novel. It attempts to contribute to both Cahter studies and the ecofeminism in general. It also provides some reference about the relationship between human beings and nature, relationship between men and women in our process of establishing harmonious society.

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